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Chapter Title: Introduction

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Book Title: Aspects of Linguistic Variation

Book Editor(s): Daniël Van Olmen, Tanja Mortelmans and Frank Brisard

Published by: De Gruyter

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvbkjwxf.3>

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# Tanja Mortelmans, Daniël Van Olmen, Frank Brisard

## Introduction

The present volume contains a selection of contributions that were written on the occasion of Johan van der Auwera's retirement. Its focus is on the study of linguistic variation, an area on which Johan has had considerable influence. It brings together papers dealing not only with cross-linguistic and diachronic variation but also with intra-linguistic and inter-speaker variation. The phenomena that are examined range from negation and tense-aspect-modality over connectives and the lexicon to definite articles and comparative concepts in well- and lesser-known languages. This collection can thus be said to reflect Johan van der Auwera's very broad linguistic interests and to contribute to our understanding of variation in general.

Johan van der Auwera graduated in Germanic Philology (Dutch and English) and Philosophy in 1975 at the University of Antwerp. In the same year, he got a doctoral scholarship to study at the University of California in Berkeley, where he stayed for two years. He then returned to finish his dissertation (on the philosophy of language: *Regaining speculative grammar – Speech acts, logic and focus*) at the University of Antwerp (1980), with Louis Goossens (professor of English Linguistics) as his supervisor. After finishing his dissertation, he spent a few months as a guest lecturer at the University of Cologne and was then awarded a two-year Postdoctoral Fellowship of the Belgian National Science Foundation, which he took up at the University of Antwerp (UIA). From 1983 until 1984, he was a Lecturer in Business English at the University of Antwerp (UFSIA), before returning to research abroad: in 1984–1985, he worked as an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the University of Hannover (1984–1985) and the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen (1985).

In 1985, at the age of only 32, he obtained a tenured position as a Fellow of the Belgian National Science Foundation at the University of Antwerp, where he


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<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110607963-001>

was affiliated with the Department of Germanic Philology. In 1990, he finished his habilitation dissertation simply entitled *Coming to terms*, which addressed aspects of the structure of the noun phrase. At the time, Johan was mainly expected to conduct research. His teaching load at the University of Antwerp (UIA) was thus restricted. Still, the courses taught from 1985 onward already reflect the width of his research interests on the one hand and their development over the years on the other: Johan taught an *Introduction to semantics* for more than ten years, he acquainted students with the structure of Yiddish (1988–1997) and introduced them to *Non-Indo-European linguistics* (1985–1989) and the *Syntax of the relative clause* (1986–1987). His course on *Semantics and logic* disappeared from the curriculum after three years (1985–1988) whereas a new course on *Typology and universals* was introduced in 1993. Johan was to teach it until the very end of his academic career.

In 1997, Johan was appointed Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Antwerp, where he became a Full Professor in 2003. In the last two decades of his university career, he taught courses on (various aspects of) English grammar, varieties of English and English creoles, the development of English, negation and linguistic typology, both in the bachelor's and in the master's program. The list of his visiting professorships is long: Johan was a visiting professor at the CNRS (Paris), Princeton University, the University of Gothenburg, Kyoto University and Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok). In 2006, he was awarded the prestigious Francqui Chair (by the Belgian Francqui Foundation), for which he gave a number of lectures on typology. He taught master and doctoral classes on various aspects of typology at the Complutense University of Madrid (2008), the University of Palermo (2009), the Université Libre de Bruxelles (2015) and the University of Roma III (2015).

In the very beginning of his career in linguistics, Johan published on classic topics within semantics and pragmatics, addressing presuppositions, conversational implicatures and indirect speech acts, to name but a few of the terms that occur in the titles of his earliest publications. In fact, his very first publication (van der Auwera 1975), which appeared as the second issue in the series *Antwerp Papers in Linguistics*, deals with semantic and pragmatic presupposition. It was the topic of his licentiate's dissertation, also supervised by Louis Goossens. His earlier publications also include work on conditionals, complementizers, relative clauses and modality, some of which reveal a rather strong logical orientation.

However, in an interview with Jolanta Šinkūnienė (2016: 295), Johan admits to having been “disappointed with this logical approach to language” at a particular stage in his career.<sup>1</sup> It is “a change of pathway” that has allegedly saved him and this change was his interest in typology, an area of linguistics which at that time (i.e., in the early nineties) was not yet prominent in Europe. An important catalyst of typological studies in Europe was the EURO-TYP-project, a large-scale research project funded by the European Science Foundation (1990–1995) which aimed at examining the range of typological variation found in the languages of Europe. Johan participated in this project, working mainly on adverbials. About ten years later, he was also one of the 55 authors of *The world atlas of language structures* (Haspelmath et al. 2005), (co)-authoring seven chapters on the expression of modality and moods. We can safely say that Johan is one of the leading typologists in Europe and perhaps even beyond.

His many publications (six monographs, over 200 scholarly articles, 23 books or special journal issues as editor) testify to his extremely broad linguistic interests: they deal with conditionals, concessives, mood(s), modal expressions, tense, negation, aspect, indefinites, impersonals, periphrastic *do*, prefixes, adverb(ial)s, similatives, relative clauses, the structure of the noun phrase, (de)grammaticalization, the status of constructions, semantic maps and so much more. In fact, it seems almost impossible to find a topic within the broad domain of the semantics of grammar on which Johan has not worked and published. The field he has had most impact on is probably (or should we use another marker here: undoubtedly?) that of modality. The article he wrote with Vladimir Plungian on *Modality’s semantic map* (van der Auwera and Plungian 1998) is one of the classic and most cited articles in the field, with no less than 986 citations on Google Scholar (on March 21, 2018).

When one looks at Johan’s impressive list of publications, a number of things strike one’s eye – and they reveal something about his person(al)ity as well. First, we should mention the fact that he has not only published in English and Dutch but also in French, German, Croatian, Russian and Chinese. This is in line with his huge language expertise: he speaks at least five languages fluently (Dutch, English, French, Swedish and German), has a more than average knowledge of many other Germanic and Romance languages, reads Russian and has notions of Thai and Mandarin. Second, many publications are the result of collaborations

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<sup>1</sup> A nice example of this change of heart can be found in the title which he gave to a volume in honor of Louis Goossens: *English as a human language* (van der Auwera, Durieux and Lejeune 1998) – an implicit reference/reply to the influential work by Richard Montague: *English as a formal language*.

with other linguists from all over the world. Throughout the years, Johan has built up an enormous international network and has been using it in an extremely generous way to connect linguists with each other. Third, Johan does not seem to have followed a particular publication strategy. Instead, we find a wide array of publication types, from articles in highly acclaimed peer-reviewed international journals (e.g., *Language*) to contributions to more local book volumes and journals.

His academic record is not limited to his publications, of course. His list of conference papers is impressive. It starts with a presentation on *Presupposition and existence* given at the University of Louisville in 1976. Over 200 other papers were to follow, which Johan presented – in his somewhat idiosyncratic but always enthusiastic manner – either alone or (which is considerably more often the case) together with other, often young researchers. To illustrate Johan's professional zeal and boundless energy, consider the nine papers that he gave in 2004, mostly together with other researchers, on a multitude of topics: negative indefinites in Flemish (April, Berkeley, USA), nominalization in Tucanoan (May, Santa Barbara, USA), the ancestors of the verb *need* (May, Verona, Italy), interrogative pro-verbs (August, Nancy, France), English modal verbs (September, Pau, France), modal polyfunctionality in Standard Average European (September, Antwerp, Belgium), imperatives in Slavonic (September, Leuven, Belgium), deverbal nouns as questions (October, Lille, France) and Slavic verbs and adverbs of epistemic possibility (November, Regensburg, Germany).

Another important aspect of Johan's academic activities concerns his professional guidance of younger linguists. Between 2002 and 2016, he supervised ten PhD dissertations, which again cover a broad range of topics: from Bultinck's (2002) dissertation on the meaning of English cardinals from a Gricean perspective over modality in Chinese and English (Li 2003), the diachrony of *need* (Taeymans 2006), tense, aspect and mood markers in Turkish (Temürçü 2007), interrogative pronominals (Idiatov 2007), imperatives (Schalley 2008; Van Olmen 2011), tense and aspect (De Wit 2014) and indefinites (Van Alsenoy 2014) to negation (Vossen 2016).

Apart from the obvious quality and quantity of the research he conducted, Johan also excelled in the number of services he has lent the academic community. At the University of Antwerp, Johan co-founded the Centre for Grammar, Cognition and Typology in 1999, which he directed until 2014 and which was also the home of many international guests. Moreover, Johan was the chair or a member of expert committees for national and international research councils such as the European Research Council (2006–2013), the European Science Foundation (2005–2010), the Belgian Research Councils (Flemish 2000–2009, French 2010–

2015) and the French, Swedish, Danish and Norwegian Research Councils, as well as various national research assessment committees. Not least remarkably, since 2005, Johan has been Editor-in-Chief of the prestigious journal *Linguistics*.

Another important chapter in Johan's professional biography is his work for the Societas Linguistica Europaea. He was elected President of the SLE in 2004. Seeing how the organization worked, Johan quickly realized there was room for improvement. More specifically, he saw the SLE's potential to grow from a Central European old boys network into a genuine European forum for linguistics. The SLE benefited immensely from Johan's excellent international contacts and his good relations with many publishers. In 2005, he proposed Teresa Fanego as the new Editor-in-Chief of *Folia Linguistica*. This was the start of a process of modernization of the SLE, which meant making the organizing more attractive to different generations. Together with people like Christian Lehmann and Anna Siewierska, Johan prepared real change. In the following years, this new dynamism was consolidated with the organization of regular board meetings and the appointment of a conference manager (a role first fulfilled by Bert Cornillie, who had worked at the University of Antwerp for some years). As a consequence of all this, the SLE has evolved into a vibrant linguistic organization with many members, whose yearly conferences are widely attended. The decisions taken under Johan's leadership have greatly contributed to this success.

It is evident from a look at his prosperous career that the hope which Johan expressed in the final words of his first publication has been more than fulfilled: "Notwithstanding restrictions we hope that we have not been beating dead horses and would be pleased if we have stuck out our neck on a few central issues." (van der Auwera 1975: 69). We hope that the present volume testifies to Johan's example and offers some new insights into issues central to one of his long-standing interests, i.e., linguistic variation – in the widest sense of the term. It includes contributions from some of Johan's collaborators that have come closest to his own interests (at one point or another) and whom he evidently respects for their work.

Dagmar Divjak looks at complementation, which has repeatedly come up in Johan's list of publications too (e.g., van der Auwera 1990; Ammann and van der Auwera 2004), and examines to what extent a theoretical analysis of Polish complementing constructions reflects either individual speakers' or the speech community's knowledge. In tribute to Johan's extensive work on areal linguistics (e.g., van der Auwera 1998a, 2011), Volker Gast and Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm make innovative use of lexical databases to study areality as a factor in lexical typology. Martin Haspelmath develops his notion of comparative concepts and

elaborates on the differences with descriptive linguistic categories, thus addressing issues raised by van der Auwera and Sahoo (2015) among others. Dmitry Idiatov's paper is the second one that takes an areal point of view. It focuses on clause-final negation in Africa and builds on much of Johan's recent research (e.g., Devos and van der Auwera 2013; van der Auwera and Van Alsenoy 2016). Ekkehard König looks at the languages of Europe – a perspective also taken in, for instance, van der Auwera (1998b) and Gast and van der Auwera (2011) – and describes the formal and functional variation of their definite articles.

Pierre Larrivé and Adeline Patard explore the diachronic implications of semantic maps, the theory of which is a recurrent theme in Johan's research (e.g., van der Auwera 2008). They also deal with two phenomena that are of central interest in his career: modality and negative indefinites (e.g., van der Auwera 2017). Jacques Moeschler's paper can be said to honor especially Johan's earlier work on theoretical pragmatics and the logic of language (e.g., van der Auwera 1985, 1997) and answers the question whether logical connectives are truth-functional. Vladimir Plungian shares his interest in verbal categories with Johan (e.g., van der Auwera and Plungian 1998; Plungian and van der Auwera 2006). His contribution to the present volume concentrates on verb paradigms in Eastern Armenian and in particular on hidden semantic distinctions close to (ir)realis and (im)perfectivity. Jean-Christophe Verstraete contributes to the literature on epistemic modality (e.g., van der Auwera and Ammann 2005; Vittrant and van der Auwera 2010) by identifying an unknown pattern of epistemic marking in the Native Australian languages of Cape York Peninsula and explaining its origins. Jacqueline Visconti, finally, examines the development of the Italian connective *anzi* 'on the contrary' and, more specifically, its procedural meanings, an area of semantics that also features prominently in Johan's work (e.g., van der Auwera 1993; van der Auwera and Coussé 2016).

**Acknowledgement:** Thanks are due to Kasper Boye, Cecil Brown, Anne Carlier, Östen Dahl, Liesbeth Degand, Maud Devos, Anaïd Donabédian, Caterina Mauri and Heiko Narrog for their help with the review process, to the authors for accepting our invitation to contribute to the volume, to Ann Kelly for suggesting that we contact De Gruyter for this project and to the entire team at De Gruyter for their enthusiasm about the volume and their support.

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